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No Kowtow Problem

The Bruce Mission to China

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Washington.

When the first American envoy to China, Commissioner Caleb Cushing, set sail 130 years ago, one of his major worries was whether he would have to kowtow to the Chinese emperor—the ritual of "three kneelings and nine prostrations" with nose upon the floor. His fears of making America appear inferior to China by such a performance were unwarranted. He never was allowed an audience with the emperor.

However, Cushing negotiated a treaty with the Chinese under which they formally accepted for the next 100 years a position of inferiority to the United States and the other Western Powers. The Treaty of Wanghia established the principle of extraterritoriality which placed Americans in China under the exclusive jurisdiction of American laws and officials.

For 130 years, the United States has dealt with diverse Chinese governments on a basis of inequality—a basis which in various ways for most of those years gave Americans special privileges, rights and influence in China and discriminated against Chinese in America.

Among the major accomplishments of the Chinese Communist regime has been eradication of the last vestiges of any kind of unequal status in China's relationship with the rest of the world.

Another major change in that direction is taking place. A new relationship between the governments in Washington and Peking will begin soon on the basis of absolute equality.

When David K. E. Bruce, the aristocratic Baltimorean and Virginia country gentleman, arrives in Peking early in May as the first American "Ambassador" to Mao Tse-tung's People's Republic of China, he will symbolize these landmark changes:

1. For the first time in American-Chinese relations, there will be no special status for the United States with Chinese governments, either by virtue of extraterritorial rights for Americans or because of lavish American financial and military aid.

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2. Nearly a quarter of a century of bitter enmity between the United States and the Communist government of China—in contrast to American uninhibited support and apology for the rival Chinese regime on the island of Taiwan—will formally end.

3. Diplomatic relations will continue between the United States and "The Republic of China"—the government of Chiang Kai-shek which was defeated by Mao's armies in 1949 and has survived on Taiwan since then because of American support. But that, too, will change and the beginning of the end of the American "special relationship" with Chiang already is underway.

Technically, Bruce will be the director of the American "liaison office" in Peking. A similar Chinese office is to be opened in Washington. But, in fact, these "liaison offices" will be embassies in everything but name.

This will mark the establishment of *de facto* diplomatic relations between Washington and Peking—a quantum jump after a generation of no contact whatever toward complete *de jure* diplomatic recognition by the United States of the Communist government of China.

Such developments were considered unthinkable as little as five years ago. But after China's initiative two years ago this spring, via ping-pong diplomacy, and the super-secret Henry A. Kissinger visit to Peking in the summer of 1971, events have moved at a remarkable speed. President Nixon's extraordinary visit to China—a trip some critics would call a kowtow to Mao—is now quickly crowned with "The Bruce Mission."

The choice of 75-year-old David Kilpatrick Este Bruce to represent the United States in Peking, and China's selection of veteran 64-year-old diplomat Huang Chen to be his counterpart in Washington underline the importance both governments attach to this historic development.

For years Bruce has been America's senior ambassador. He is the only American in history who has served as ambassador to Europe's Big Three: Britain, France and Germany. One of John F. Kennedy's major mistakes was failure to make Bruce his Secretary of State after considering him and then deciding against him because of age—Bruce brings more than his long diplomatic experience to this new, exciting venture. He helped create the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II, the forerunner of the post-war CIA. He is immensely wealthy—a connoisseur of art, fine food and French wines—an intellectual who wrote a history of the first 16 American Presidents—and a man of considerable business-banking experience and (in his younger years) minor political experience, as well as a man who wielded in a quiet, effective manner powerful influences in shaping the recovery of Europe after World War II.

Huang Chen also is one of China's senior diplomats who has served as ambassador to Hungary, Indonesia and France and, like Bruce, held high positions in the Foreign Ministry. He has been a political activist since the days of the Long March in which he participated and has also been a military commander in the field. Among the Peking hierarchy, he is the only one with a background in the arts—a graduate from the Fine Arts Academy in Shanghai—a painter, poet and playwright.

The date of Bruce's arrival in Peking is planned for "about the first of May." Given Nixon's obsession with "firsts" and historical parallels, May 8 might be an appropriate date.

It was on May 8, 1843, that Secretary of State Daniel Webster signed his instructions for Caleb Cushing to go to China and try to negotiate a treaty that would protect and help American businessmen and missionaries. A year later, on July 3, 1844, the Treaty of Wanghia was signed and American-Chinese governmental relations began.

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Bruce's instruction will be very different than those handed to our first envoy to China by Daniel Webster, who apparently feared China would treat Cushing as a tribute bearer, or force him to indulge in the kowtow rite.

"You will signify to all Chinese authorities and others," Webster instructed Cushing, "that it is deemed to be quite below the dignity of the Emperor of China and the President of the United States of America to be concerning themselves with such unimportant matters as presents from one to the other."

Imagine Webster's reaction to Mao's gift of Pandas to the United States and Nixon's gift of musk oxen to China!

And just as today there is a third power related to the new American-Chinese relationship—Soviet Russia—so in 1843 the United States was engaged in a triangular diplomatic game. The nation that Cushing was urged to warn China about was Britain and he was instructed to call attention to Britain's invidious colonial policy, especially in India.

The last major American mission to China was that of the late Gen. George C. Marshall who, in 1946, tried to avert a civil war by persuading Mao and Chiang to form a coalition government. He failed, but the full details of his instructions and his efforts were made public only last year, 25 years later.

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